**Janelle Brevard:** You're listening to [Drive with NAR](https://magazine.realtor/drive), powered by [REALTOR® magazine](https://magazine.realtor/). Listen in as two real estate pros talk must-have tools of the trade and share stories of inspiration. Get ready to step up your business. Hello, hello! Happy day, everyone. I'm Janelle Brevard, NAR’s chief storyteller. Welcome to Drive with NAR. For today's episode, we're going to tackle an area that is my first love as a former Capitol Hill staffer, and that's advocacy. Today, I'm fortunate to listen in on two people who put in the miles walking the halls of Washington in their respective states on behalf of REALTOR® issues. Dan Wagner is senior vice president, government relations, for the Inland Real Estate Group of Companies Inc., based in Oak Brook, Illinois, and Nykea Pippion McGriff is vice president of strategic growth for Coldwell Banker Realty in Chicago. She's also a candidate for the 1st Congressional District seat in Illinois. And I am super honored because both of them are past presidents of the Chicago Association of REALTORS®. So how lucky am I? Welcome, you guys.

**Nykea Pippion McGriff:** Thank you, Janelle.

**Dan Wagner:** Thank you, Janelle.

**JB:** It's a pleasure to have you here. I would love to start this off—before we get into the advocacy issues—I always like to warm you guys up with a little question. So here's the question of the day. Are you ready? What's your favorite way to wind down or stay zen in the midst of a stressful market?

**DW:** I have an incredible dog named Patton. It's a Portuguese Water Dog. And I take Patton for a long walk in the park.

**JB:** I love the name Patton. That's amazing.

**DW:** She is one of the loves of my life, besides my triplets plus one—I have four kids—and my beautiful wife, Lisa. So what I do to relax is I love walking. And taking my dog for a walk is what helps me to unwind.

**JB:** That's very cool. Nykea?

**NPM:** Yes, well, pre-COVID, my stress relief was travel and obviously had to readjust. So like Dan, I like to get outside, get some fresh air, and most importantly, kind of unplug from technology. We're so, you know, immersed in technology. So it's been important for me to create, you know, a no-technology time.

**JB:** I love it. I love it. The fact that you guys take time out when you're doing all these busy things for REALTORS®. That's amazing. Both of you have been very active in the advocacy arena when it comes to REALTOR® issues. So I'd love to hear what motivated you to get engaged, just, in the whole advocacy arena. What started this? Dan?

**DW:** Sure. Working here at the Inland Real Estate Group of Companies, I work for four incredible people that—these four teachers of the Chicago Public School—teachers that founded Inland. They got other Chicago Public School teachers to give them money, and they invested in real estate some 50 years ago. And when they got up to a certain amount, they left teaching. And then they reached 42,000 apartments, the largest landlord in Chicago. And with that experience, they did it through limited partnerships. Well, in the ’80s, the tax laws changed, and some of those limited partnerships were underwater. And those four teachers would not allow anyone to go bankrupt. So they put all their money back in the company. And they went to Walmart and they said, ‘Hey, Walmart, can we do sale leasebacks with you?’ And Walmart said, ‘We've never done that before. But sure, we'll give it a try with these teachers.’ And then at the same time, they went to Treasury and they said, ‘Hey, Treasury, can we 1031 like-kind exchange these people in these underwater deals into a fractional share interest of Walmarts?’ And Treasury said, ‘Oh, my gosh, nobody's done that before. Absolutely, sure, you're gonna save these people? Great.’ So that's kind of like ‘It's a Wonderful Life’ moment for the company, and what leadership was able to identify is that this advocacy is super important because they never wanted to have government happen to them again. So advocacy is really big. And then they have been involved in real estate long enough to know that there's nothing more powerful than the National Association of REALTORS®. And so getting involved with the National Association and the state and local is a big part of Inland and what we do. And we not only talk the talk, we walk the walk with all of our associations and support everything financially and across the board. We care. And we appreciate all the work that NAR does.

**NPM:** I got engaged with advocacy early on with the housing crash and 2007/2008. I had just a little bit more time on my hands. So I actually started reading most of the emails that came from NAR and from the state and local association as well. But one thing that really stood out to me is when I attended the legislative meetings in D.C. in 2013. I went by myself. I had no idea what I was getting into. And I will just say I have been passionate about advocacy since then. Things like all of the forums. Are they are talking about, ‘Hey, these are the top issues that we're focused on. This is how it impacts homeownership or property owners rights.’ So I have been hooked ever sense. During that time, I was invited to attend one of the FPC meetings for a member of Congress in Illinois. And I've been hooked ever since.

**JB:** So what was one of the first things you worked on when you first got involved with advocacy? I want to hear about that.

**DW:** So one of the issues that came up, when I first started with advocacy for NAR, was the issue of sales tax collection at the sale of when you go to a store and buy something. So brick and mortar stores were getting killed, because there was not equality among people that buy things online. We're not having—they legally had to collect the sales tax and pay it, but they just weren't. And there was nothing that was stopping or getting people to do that. And so a lot of brick and mortars were being unfairly targeted by government policies, because they were literally having sometimes 10% more cost for their product, by buying into brick and mortar compared to online sales. And so NAR, the staff at all levels—at the local, state and national level—were talking to me and said, ‘Boy, we have to go to the Tax Committee at NAR. And we have to make sure and get them to approve this. So what that meant was we had to then get the local association to say that, yes, indeed, this is an issue. And then they brought that up to the state and the state voted. And then they brought it to the national and then to be a part of, again, that three-way agreement, where you have the local, state and national all in concert working together. And being able to highlight that for the real estate community, making sure that the brick and mortar community has the same level playing field is a big deal.

**JB:** That's awesome. One question I would like to ask you, Nykea, because we did talk earlier about you being a candidate for Congress this time around. I understand that the RPAC federal disbursement trustees have approved a maximum contribution of $5,000 to your campaign for the June primary. So I want to just start there and find out, you know, you've been working as a REALTOR® for a very long time. What motivated you to run for Congress now?

**NPM:** Well, thanks, Janelle. It's been a whirlwind. You know, I'll say the passion really started as a federal political coordinator for Congressman Bobby Rush. In that role, I've been able to really learn more about the legislation that impacts property owner rights, but more importantly, tell that story. It's funny that your title is chief storyteller. But really, when we talk about legislation and the impact that it has on the constituents at home, it’s understanding how to tell that story so that our members of Congress or members of the Senate really understand the impact that legislation happens, you know, that legislation impacts us at home. And so that has been a focus for me. And I'm also just a mom, right? I'm running to fight for other people's children, just like I've always fought for mine. Unfortunately, I lost my oldest son to gun violence in 2017. And I've been advocating well before that, but since then, it's really been about advocating for our communities. How can we make sure that we have the resources available in our communities, so that people can heal, people can grow, and people can thrive? When we talk about on the real estate side, I've been an advocate since day one. When I purchased my condo as a first as a first-time buyer and a single mom, I didn't have the best experience. So I decided to become a REALTOR® so that I can kind of armed myself with information and be an advocate rather for the next first-time homebuyer. So I've really spent my years—17 years in this business—being an advocate for homeownership and wealth-building through property ownership.

**JB:** You know, Nykea, your drive to make a difference after your son was so tragically taken is such an inspiration to us all. Dan, I know you had your own inspirations to get involved. Switching gears a bit, I'd like to hear from both of you: What has helped you strengthen your ability to do advocacy work?

**DW:** The gold standard of advocacy in Washington D.C. is the National Association of REALTORS®, and let's face it: REALTORS® are our folks that are boots on the ground. They know everything that's going on in their community, and these elected officials really listen to them. And so when we're able to have that kind of power to be able to bring what's going on in the local district back to the member of Congress, how we illustrate the changes they want to do. And Washington impacts their personal community through a REALTOR® telling them with their own personal experience—unbelievably powerful. The other thing I would say is the REALTORS® are the only bipartisan organization, I think, left in America. And that's what makes us so strong. We all believe in private property rights. But we'll have people that are on the conservative side, on the liberal side, in the middle, and we all lock arms together, and we walk into our members’ offices, and they're blown away that ‘Wait a second, you're a conservative. Wait a second, you're liberal. But you're all agreed on this issue of private property rights?’ And that just blows their minds in Washington. And I'm so proud to be a REALTOR®. And I can't think of any better organization to be a part of.

**NPM:** Well, I definitely want to echo what Dan says. And if you think about it as a REALTOR®, what do we do every day? We bring two people together. We bring opposite sides together. Our goal every day is to put people together for one common goal—someone's got to give up one thing, the other side's got to give up something else. But that's what we do all day. And we truly are the conduits of our community. But you know, and we are—like they say—the boots on the ground, the feet on the street. We have a unique understanding of how legislation impacts the communities that we're all serving. And NAR just does an exceptional job, not only on advocating, but actually the education piece that I want to talk about. Because there are forums that are available to us throughout the year. Of course [nar.realtor](https://www.nar.realtor/). You can go on the advocacy page. You know, as a federal political coordinator, we have toolkits that really help us do our volunteer work. And I do want to stress that these are volunteer positions, being a federal political coordinator. So these are REALTORS®—535 REALTORS®—from around the world that are taking time away from their families, their businesses, to give back to our industry. That's how passionate we are about moving our industry forward and making sure that our legislators understand the impacts of some of the items that come across their desk.

**JB:** Oh, wow. That's great. I have to ask this question, because I'm really curious about it. But what would you say is the most critical advocacy issue facing the real estate industry today? Nykea?

**NPM:** When we look at the disparity in homeownership between different groups, we still have—specifically African Americans still lag well behind many other groups. And I think that's largely due to, you know, we can talk about the lack of inventory, but we still are seeing some disparity in lending practices, access to credit and capital. So I think those are definitely some issues. We're going to continue to talk about flood insurance. It's been reauthorized at least for the last six, seven years. So we actually need a long-term solution as opposed to continued reauthorization. I know that NAR is still looking and still heavily involved with Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, and whether those GSEs are going to be privatized. Looking at the fees that are being charged. Transportation and infrastructure are some items that we've been discussing for a few years as well. We know that a viable community, there has to be infrastructure, you've got to have viable commercial space and activity as well. And I know that's near and dear to Dan's heart. We've been advocating—I've been advocating alongside Dan for the 1031 exchange.

**DW:** I would echo—I agree 1,000%, with Nykea on those issues. And in general, I would say that one of the most critical advocacy issues in real estate today is government considering or elected officials thinking that real estate is their personal piggy bank. I think that is something that wakes us all up at night, when you have people that are putting their life savings on the line getting, buying an apartment. And they are told, ‘We're going to try to pass rent control.’ Well, they're not going to—the government leaders aren't going to reduce taxes. Well, how are they going to pay taxes? I mean, rent controls horrible. You have the whole issue related to the 1031 exchange. Recently, we had the Build Back Better program where it talked about eliminated the 1031, doubling capital gains, eliminating the step-up in basis. All those things would be just devastating to our real estate community. Underserved communities benefit by having the 1031 exchange where food deserts actually are turned into places that have grocery stores. You have open space that are in forest reserves all around the country, and farmers would who are dirt rich and cash poor would never sell their farm if they didn't have the 1031, like-kind exchange. So that helps with the green aspect of things. Trade unions, they invest in REITs, and REITs use 1030 ones all the time. And by eliminating the 1031, that impacts REITs, which impacts the amount of money people get back in their pensions. So there’s not simple issues. We have to be able to explain these things. Because sometimes elected officials, we want to find that quick answer. And we have to sit back and say, ‘No, this is your reality. We have to talk about some of these things that can be difficult to talk about.’

**JB:** One thing I wanted to ask you both is, you know, we live in an increasingly polarized environment. Dan, I'd like to hear about, you know, when you're doing your advocacy work, how do you cut through the noise to get lawmakers’ attention? And then Nykea, I would love to hear for you afterwards, you know, both from an advocacy perspective, but also, you know, from a candidate perspective: How do you cut through the noise?

**DW:** Sure, well, again, I keep highlighting about the FPCs. A vast majority of them are Democrats; I happen to be Republican. And so I was able to go into these meetings, really, really armed with the local federal political coordinator, who is able to instantly give me credibility with members of Congress that are, you know, the opposite party than me. And obviously, the vitriol sometimes between parties, it's pretty intense. But when I'm able to, you know, say someone's name at their local level. I mean, you know, I'm doing the Zoom call or whatever, from Oakbrook, Illinois, but I'm talking to somebody in California. And when I mention that FPC, who helped get them elected, who is their own personal REALTOR®, who was the family babysitter, or whatever it is. It just, it really cuts through everything. And a lot of walls come down, and then you're able to talk individually as human beings. And once you get past, the vitriol, all kinds of stuff that's been out there. And I think it's wonderful to be able to get back to where our country needs to be, which is having, you know, intelligent, educated conversations. And clearly not every member of Congress I talked to ended up agreeing with me, but because I'm able to say, ‘I'm here, and I'm part of the National Association of REALTORS®. And I know your FPC.’ That just brings everything to such a nice level. So the more I think you can make it more humanized and more related to their district and to their own lives. Because I have triplets. And one FPC was able to tell me that Senator Wyden who I met with that he had triplets. So that was a wonderful thing to be able to highlight, and that helps to reduce walls.

**KPM:** When we look at how do we cut through the noise from a candidate perspective, it's, you know, by doing the work, bringing policy back to the people. And I think we have a disconnect with, you know, what's happening policy wise, with the communities and constituents that we're serving. How do we start with a conversation? How do we start with what the communities need, what the constituents need, as opposed to, hey, this is something I think sounds good. You know, I do want to say, I'm not a career politician. This is my first time running for office, I have always lived my life. And my, you know, my leadership journey shows that if there's a need, if there's something that needs to get done, we can stay on the sidelines and complain about it. Or we can get in the game, if you will, and try to make a difference. And that's really, truly what I'm trying to do here is take the experience not only from as a REALTOR®, but as a federal political coordinator about advocacy. How do we advocate for our communities? Because ultimately, both parties want—and both sides if you will—want livable communities and livable business districts, right? So when we look at what's happening in our communities, it's about, I think, really, how do we bring people back together? Because right now, it's not happening.

**JB:** Nykea, you mentioned something in your answer about having a choice of staying on the sidelines or getting in the game. And so I wanted to ask you about that in terms of, what would you say to REALTORS® out there listening who may not have gotten involved in the advocacy front yet? What would you say to them in terms of why they should get involved?

**NPM:** Well, you know, on a personal level, it's your business. You know, as a REALTOR®, you should be well versed on what's happening not only on a transactional level, but what's happening in the industry, what's happening on the mortgage side, what's preventing your buyers, as an example, from being able to accomplish their goals? Are there any issues that are impacting your sellers being able to, you know, accomplish their goals? So I think just purely on a business side, you should be as well versed as possible when we're handling probably the most important piece of information—right?—the most important purchase that many people are going to make in their lives. When I look at homeownership, I look at that as a path to wealth-building for most Americans. And it's so important that I do, you know, as a REALTOR® that I do the absolute best I can for that consumer. And that means that I'm studying my industry, I'm studying to make sure that when a situation occurs, I can—if I'm not the expert—I can partner them with Dan, as an example. I can, or someone from Inland if it's a commercial deal. So really, you should be engaged, because you should be the expert in all things real estate, or at least have those relationships. And I think, personally, when you look at the advocacy piece—like for me, I started getting engaged and learning more and more about it, you know. In 2008, as an example, the Mortgage Debt Relief Act, I may not still be in business today. So again, it was a class or a blog that came out from NAR, and I said, ‘Oh, wow, I need to learn more about this,’ as opposed to telling sellers, ‘Oh, I'm so sorry, I can't help.’ And again, I think it doesn't require a heavy lift. It's simply maybe that you know, once a month, you take a look at [nar.realtor](https://www.nar.realtor/), click on advocacy, and read one article as to what's happening at the federal level, or even at the state level. And of course, we have government affairs directors, both at local state and the federal levels. So I would say, you know, for any REALTOR® that's not engaged so far. Put it in your calendar. I'm very Outlook-focused. Schedule at least once a month that you're reading some sort of article as to what's happening in the industry.

**DW:** Yeah, I agree with Nykea 100%. It is just vital that fellow members of the association get active in NAR and their state and their local because it's everything for your business. Sometimes commercial people say, ‘Wait a second, why am I going to be involved with the National Association of REALTORS®? That's just a residential organization? Are you kidding me?’ Oh, I think it's 51% of all legislation they work on is commercial. And it is it is such a wonderful thing when commercial members get involved when they start realizing, ‘Oh my gosh, I have an issue with a road problem of the egress/ingress coming out of my property. What can I do?’ And there's the staff person at NAR or at the local level that you can call. And they'll know the staff person at the city and we're at the state. And there's millions of examples of this all across the country and in every area. You have people that are working on your behalf every day. And if you're not involved in—what do they say? If you're not at the table, you're on the menu.

**KPM:** If you don't have a seat at the table, it's likely you're on the menu.

**JB:** Love it. I'm going to remember that. You guys, we like to end each episode with an ‘In the Trenches’ moment. And you guys have shared some great things. I would love to just hear you share one moment where you were really in the trenches, you know, running your business or advocating on the state, federal, local level, where you were deep in the trenches and how that turned out. I would love to hear your examples because I think it's going to be really good. Dan, what do you have?

**DW:** Oh gosh, with the 1031 advocacy, it was so much fun to find out. I won't mention the senator’s name. But we had a great meeting with a U.S. senator. And in our discussion, one of the most important things for me to tell them is that NAR cares about the 1031 and they don't want the 1031 touched. You can't get rid of it, and this Senator took it to heart. And probably one of the coolest things is that NAR was able to contact me about a week after that meeting and said, ‘Dan, we just had an entire statewide Zoom call with all REALTORS® on the Zoom with the U.S. senator that you talked to.’ And they highlighted that the senator was going on, you know, talking about what's going on in Washington and going on and on and on. And then all of a sudden, it just clicked in his mind and what I said about the 1031 and he just stopped all conversation. He said, ‘Oh, wait a second. REALTORS®! REALTORS®! You need to know. I don't want to get rid of the 1031. I'm going to talk to the President. We can't get rid of the 1031 like-kind exchange. It's so important. I know it's important to you.’ Oh my gosh, that made my day and week month. There's so many issues in Washington, so many things that are being talked about. For this United States senator to remember that conversation and bring it up in the middle of his discussion and like, ‘Oh, I totally forgot about this,’ couldn't have been better and clearer. Those things—those educational meetings—worked. That me and NAR doing so much work that the 1031 has been saved and it's been phenomenal to see that.

**NPM:** Love it, Dan. I will say it, you know, I am in the trenches as we speak as a candidate for 1st Congressional District. I have leaned very heavily on the REALTOR® community. Illinois REALTORS® leadership and staff has just been fantastic. When I look at being out, knocking on doors, trying to get signatures for the petitions, I was surrounded by my REALTOR® family, you know, from government affairs directors to my Women's Council of REALTORS® family and other REALTORS® that I've met over the years. And so this truly to me is a REALTOR® campaign. It is about time that the REALTOR® organization, you know. So for any REALTOR® listening, now is our time. You need to step up and run for whatever office you've been thinking about. Today's the day, whether that's local school council, you know, your local or state or federal office. But really, this has been a REALTOR® community campaign, you know, from fundraising—as you realize, it's a pretty hefty lift. And I can just say that my REALTOR® community, my REALTOR® family has donated.

**DW:** I've donated!

**KPM:** Dan has donated. Thank you! And I would just say, literally, I'm in the trenches, and it's so easier because I'm surrounded by the REALTORS® community.

**JB:** No, that's awesome. Nykea, we will have to circle back with you after June to see how things go.

**NPM:** Well, [NykeaforCongress.com](https://www.nykeaforcongress.com/), in case anyone has questions, and the primary, yes, is June 28.

**JB:** Awesome. Well, Nykea Pippion McGriff, Dan Wagner, you guys have been absolutely phenomenal. Thank you for joining today.

**DW:** Janelle, you're fabulous. We appreciate you. Everybody should vote Nykea. Go, Nykea, go, go, go, Nykea!

**NPM:** Janelle, you are fantastic. Thank you for having me. Dan, as always, it's a pleasure whenever we get together. We have a little fun, so I appreciate you.

**JB:** Thank you, guys. Thanks for joining us on this episode of Drive With NAR. Tune in every month on [magazine.realtor/drive](https://magazine.realtor/drive) or subscribe wherever you get your podcasts. Get more tips to boost your business at [magazine.realtor](https://magazine.realtor/).